RAJYA SABHA

Tuesday, the 27th April, 1993/17 Vaisakha, 1915 (Saka)

The House met at eleven of the Clock,

Mr. Chairman in the Chair

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Strike by Air India flight engineers

*21. SHRI G. G. SWELL : Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION AND TOURISM be pleased to state :

(a) whether the recent strike by the Air India flight engineers has ended;

(b) if not, what is the number of aircraft grounded, the number of pilots out of work and the loss to the airlines so far; and

(c) the difficulties Government face in meeting their demands just as Governmnent met all the demands of the Indian Airlines pilots earlier ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF SURFACE TRANSPORT (SHRI JAGDISH TYTLER) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) Do not arise.

SHRI SURESH KALMADI : Sir, the question is to be answered by the Civil Aviation Minister but the answer is given by the Minister of State of the Ministry of Surface Transport. I don't know how this has happened. It is because the Civil Aviation Ministry has been grounded after the air-crash that it is answered by the Surface Transport Ministry or is there any change of Ministries ?

MR. CHAIRMAN : Anyway, it has got wings and that is why the Minister is here.

SHRI GHULAM NABI AZAD : Sir, yesterday, as you know, an unfortunate air-crash took place at Aurangabad and I had flown to Aurangabad and I wrote to the hon. Chairman that on my behalf the Minister for Surface Transport who was earlier the Civil Aviation Minister would reply but in the early morning I have come back to Delhi.

MR. CHAIRMAN : First supplementary. Shri G. G. Swell.

SHRI G. G. SWELL : Sir, after two mishaps in quick succession—one the hijacking of an aircraft on flight to Srinagar on 24th and the other yesterday's air-crash-one feels sad and subdued and not in a mood really to take on the Minister... (*interruptions*)... Sir, is he asking any question

MR. CHAIRMAN : Please speak. I am observing.

SHRI G. G. SWELL : Mr. Suresh, don't disturb me. If you want, you can ask a question.

MR. CHAIRMAN : The first supplementary is being asked.

SHRI G. G. SWELL : But the flimsy manner in which the Minister answers has annoyed me and I will take on him. This question was framed at the time when the strike was on. Now you are just fortunate that the strike is called off. Is everything hunky-dory and nothing else has happened? The strike was there for almost two months. During this period, I would like to know how many aircraft were grounded, how much loss in terms of revenue the Air India and the Indian Airlines have suffered, how many pilots were out of job and out of Training after being trained and how many have had to be given special training so that they could be kept abreast and the work could go on ? Has anything happened or nothing has happened ? Do you mean to say that because the strike has ended, nothing has happened, no loss has been incurred, no damage has been done ? Do you mean to say this ?

Now, Sir, the strike by the Air India engineers came closely in the wake of almost a two-month strike by the Indian Airlines' pilots which caused a lot of damage, many people had suffered, many pilots were out of job and we had had to take on wet

lease foreign aircraft with disastrous results; a former Minister for Civil Aviation had to resign.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Please put it as a question now.

SHRI G. G. SWELL : And a new Minister came in and he surrendered to the pilots, appeased them, gave them all that they wanted including meal allowance, 50% or 100%, which they have been demanding for the last five years. I would like to know how much money you have paid to the pilots in order to appease them and get them back to work.

I would like to know whether there are any other conditions of the IA pilots which you did not meet. Well, this is my first question.

SHRI GHULAM NABI AZAD : Sir, there are so many questions. Of course, they are all valid questions... (*Interruptions*)... Sir, the honourable Member has said that the answer is evasive. Naturally so, because I am answering today and I am not answering on the day when the question was put. So, I have to answer according to the day. Today, as far as the strike is concerned, it is already over and there is no strike any more. As for the estimated net loss of revenue from the 27th February upto the 25th of April, 1993 it is Rs. 91.80 crores and the estimated net loss till the 25th is Rs. 53 crores.

Regarding the second part of his question as to how many aircraft were grounded during the strike, Sir, we have a total of 22 aircraft as far as Air-India is concerned. Normally, all the 22 never operate together. Almost 70 to 80 per cent of the aircraft operate when we have the peak season because a few of the aircraft are grounded for check-ups and maintenance and other things. I would only like to say that as far as 747 is concerned, which is a Jumbo, normally eight aircraft are used. But, during the strike period, three aircraft were in operation with the help of the Executive Flight Engineers on Delhi/London/Delhi and Bombay/Dubai/Bombay routes.

As far as A-310 is concerned, we have eight aircraft in normal conditions. These aircraft are in operation. But I would like to say that during the strike period, out of the eight aircraft, seven aircraft instead of six were in operation. One extra aircraft was put in operation in addition to the normal ones.

As far as A-300 is concerned, we have only three of them and out of the three, two need major repairs. One is being sent abroad and the other is being sent here for maintenance. Only one was operational and due to the strike it could not be operated. I would like to inform the honourable Member that from the 27th onwards, that is, from today till the 2nd of May, we will be operating almost all the major international flights and from the 2nd May onwards, we will be operating a hundred per cent the 747 and have already said that A-310 are more than a hundred per cent in operation and with regard to A-300, we have three only and one is being sent for maintenance abroad and the other is being maintained here only. The other one will be in operation within two or three days. With regard to the other part of his Question, I do not agree with the honourable Member about the Indian Airlines. Rather I would submit to the honourable Member that once the IA strike took place, I had joined just then. Immediately when I joined this Ministry, there was a strike by the Indian Airlines' pilots.

So, immediately we had some negotiation, and this negotiation is not something new. There is always an agreement between the Management and the Pilots which is being done after every two years. So, this is not something new.

This has been the practice for the last two decades. So, they were not able to sort out. And after I took over the Ministry, we were able to sort out this. But I would like to inform the House that it is for the first time that we settled the issue not only retrospectively but also prospectively. And an agreement was signed for a period of five years, two years for the retrospective period and three years for the prospective period. So, the hon. Member should rather appreciate that it was for the first time that the retrospective issues were not only settled, but rather an agreement was signed for the coming three years also. We had to pay only Rs. 5 crores to the Pilots for the five years.

Even otherwise, in normal practice, after every two years, there is an agreement and the retrospective issues are settled. So, what I did was that not only the retrospective issues were settled but also prospectively for the coming three years. So, it is not that I pampered something. Rather we did something that... (*Interruptions*) Well, you do not want the positive point... (*Interruptions*)

SHRI DIPEN GHOSH : By that way, can you prevent the Pilots from going on strike again ?

SHRI GHULAM NABI AZAD : Unless you help them in doing so, they will not do so.

As far as the Flight Engineers are concerned, Sir, I am very sorry to say that when the settlement was reached between the Indian Airlines' Pilots and the Management, some of the friends in the media also blew it out of proportion. And this was on of the reasons and, of course, if I had pampered them earlier, and I did pamper them this time, then why should it continue for two months ?

MR. CHAIRMAN : Second supplementary.

SHRI G. G. SWELL : Sir, the fact remains that the Minister met all the demands of the Indian Airlines Pilots and that is now he was able to bring an end to the strike. It is also a fact that he had to meet the demands of the Flight Engineers and that is how he was able to bring about a settlement. If there is a future prospective settlement, I congratulate him. I hope this will be the end of these troubles. But my point is...

MR. CHAIRMAN : Is it a question ?

SHRI G. G. SWELL : Yes, Sir, a request. How far can the appeasement go ? You appease one section today, and another section will come tomorrow, and the game goes on. Now, Sir, the only alternative is to provide the public with alternative means of air transport. But the Minister has been making noises of putting curbs on the operation of the private air taxi service; he has been talking of that, Now, what is your policy ? It is your policy to maintain the monopoly of our national carriers ? Is it your policy to ease out the private operators in this country and leave the public in this country to the whims of these two national carriers or you want to give the people alternative services which will be good for them and will not put the public entirely to ransom in the hands or the whims of the airlines pilots or of the engineers ?

SHRI GHULAM NABI AZAD : Sir, the question does not pertain to this because this is with regard to strikes. But I would like to make one thing very clear that there has been a lot of propaganda outside that I have been stopping or coming in the way of private airlines. It is not like that...

SHRI KAMAL MORARKA : We congratulate you if you are coming in the way.

SHRI DIPEN GHOSH : If you are coming in the way, we congratulate you.

SHRI GHULAM NABI AZAD : Sir, what I had said was... (*Interruptions*) What I said was that the day the NOCs were issued to the private airlines, they started approaching the pilots, the engineers and other technical staff of the Indian Airlines to recruit them for their aircraft. The whole purpose of having the private airlines is to augment the existing airlines and not to ground the national carrier. What I have said is that the private airlines should not fly at the cost of the national carrier. They have already taken as many as 100 pilots and as many as 40 or 44 engineers from the Indian Airlines. If the hon. Member is happy with that situation that they should take pilots and engineers from the Indian Airlines and the private airlines should fly in the air and the national carrier should be grounded, I am sorry, as long as I am the Minister I will not allow that to happen.

SHRI G. G. SWELL : That is only for an alternative means of transport. It is not the intention that the national airlines should be grounded.

CHOWDHRY HARI SINGH : With your permission, may I know from the hon. Minister as to what were the demands of those people during the recent strike of the employees, the pilots and the engineers of Air India? I would also like to know whether the demands were such that they could not be met in the next 20 years.

SHRI GHULAM NABI AZAD : Basically, there were three demands put forward by the flight engineers. One was that they should be given three stripes on the uniform and a full wing equal to that of a First Officer, that is, Pilot. Second demand was that there should be a second Flight Engineer on the long haul flight, and the third demand was that Air India should introduce the concept of Integrated Cockpit Crew. Right from the beginning, the view of the management was that as far as the demand for stripes on the uniform is concerned, the management will have no objection but, of course, this could be sorted out in consultation with the pilots because they are also a party to it, because they wanted parity with the pilots. We agreed that this could be sorted out in consultation with the IPG.

As far as the demand to have a second Flight Engineer for the long haul flying is concerned, as per the international regulations, and we have seen it in different parts of the world, mostly on long haul flights which are of more than 16 hours, a second engineer is provided. But under the present or the existing system, we do not have long haul flights of more that ten and a half hours, and we said that it is not possible because this is not being done in any part of the world.

As far as training is concerned, they actually wanted that there should be Integrated Cockpit Crew. In the rest of the world, they have a system that the engineer progressively becomes a Commander. But the difference between their engineer and our engineer is that their engineers are professional fliers and our engineers are not fliers. They are only technical people. So we said, yes, this can be done but this could also be done in consultation with the pilots to which they did not agree.

SHRI V. RAJAN CHELLAPPA : The result of the fight between the airlines, the engineers, the pilots and the Govt. is poor maintenance of the aircraft which led to the tragic accident yesterday. The pilots' Association says that this crash may be due to overloading. The other version is that the wheels of the aircraft were slow to take the aircraft back into landing position. I would like to know from the Minister as to what

steps have been taken to maintain the aircraft properly and also to have cordial relations with the engineering staff...

MR. *CHAIRMAN : This is different. This does not relate to the main question.

SHRI V. RAJAN CHELAPPA : And also whether the Minister has any idea to assign as Mr. Scindia did.

SHRI GHULAM NABI AZAD : As far as yesterday's incident is concerned, in the later part of the day I will come with a statement.

SHRI SURESH KALMADI : The strike by Flight Engineers was carried on for some time. Then, Air India decided to take 14 flight engineers from abroad. I believe they are landing in India in a day or two. What is the fate of these 14 flight engineers who have been taken from abroad? I would like to know this first.

Secondly, I would like to know whether any executive engineers took part in the strike and whether any action is being taken against them. The hon. Minister has mentioned just now that services will start from today. In this connection, I would like to bring out the flight safety aspect. The aircraft, the engineers and the pilots have been grounded for over 30 days. Therefore, all the pilots and engineers need a route check. I would like to know whether all the mandatory provisions have been complied with before allowing flights on international routes. Otherwise, it would be a gross safety hazard. I hope the Government is keeping all these norms intact. I hope these norms have been observed before permitting take off. There is no hurry to take off. Please observe all the rules before you take off.

SHRI GHULAM NABI AZAD : The hon. Member has said that Air India was going to take some engineers from abroad. Yes. This was as per an agreement. Otherwise, it would have taken a little more time. There was no harm in that. We had signed an agreement under which 14 flight engineers were to come within a week. Now, after this issue has been settled, there is no need for them to come to this place. But I think this was a wise step because it would also put pressure on the engineers that we can do without them.

As far as the executive flight engineers are concerned, after the Government of India declared the strike illegal, we wanted to take action against the engineers. Out of the 9 executive engineers, 6 had joined the line engineers on strike. One of them has been dismissed from service.

In regard to the safety part, the strike ended on 23rd April. We are taking off from today only. All precautions will be observed before the flights take off.

SHRI KAMAL MORARKA : Sir, I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether he stands by his recent statement that private operators to private airlines, will not be allowed to operate in the country. Under the Air Corporations Act, there is a specific provision which prohibits any private airline from running services in India. That is the statutory position.

SHRI GHULAM NABI AZAD : The question is about the strike.

SHRI KAMAL MORARKA : It arises from the Minister's reply. He had said that it was a propaganda being made that he was objecting to private airlines. I must congratulate him. He has come out with the statement that the Government's policy is to have air taxis only. Now, air taxis, by any stretch of definition, - in the Oxford dictionary or any other dictionary— cannot mean private airlines. Therefore, I would like to know specifically from the hon. Minister, what steps he is taking to stop the private airlines from operating in the country.

SHRI GHULAM NABI AZAD : Sir, the point raised by the hon. Member does not arise out of this question. But for the sake of the hon. Member, I would like to say that I have already told the Director-General of Civil Aviation that he should give another directive that no private airlines should print any scheduled service which is being operated.

122. [*The Questioners (Shri Anant Ram Jaiswal and Shri Digvijay Singh were absent. For answer* vide *col. . . infra.*]

*23. [*The Questioner (Shri Mohammed Afzal alias Meem Afzal) was absent. For answed* vide *col.. .....infra.*]

Assignment given by RBI to blacklisted auditors' firms

*24. SHRI KAMAL MORARKA : Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that the Reserve Bank of India have blacklisted a number of auditors' firms;

(b) if so, what are the names of the firms and what are the reasons therefor;

(c) whether some such firms still continue the assignment given by RBI to them to re-examine the role of RBI and make a report on its functioning over the next few years; and

(d) if so, what is the justification in giving such firms such an important assignment after blacklisting them ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PARLIAMENTRY AFFAIRS (DR. ABRAR AHMED) : Reserve Bank of India have reported that they have not blacklisted any audit firm.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) No, Sir. The audit firm which was given the assignment has already submitted its report to RBI.

(d) Does not arise.

SHRI KAMAL MORARKA : Mr. Chairman, Sir, it is a very serious matter and I need your protection. Members of Parliament spend so much of their time and money in asking questions, but the kind of replies they have been getting not only mislead the House, but the whole country as well. Sir, 17 firms of chartered accountants have not been reappointed in the respective banks by the Reserve Bank of India.

Newspapers have reported that they have been blacklisted. The Institute of Chartered Accountants wrote to the Reserve Bank expressing concern because those 17 firms are the country's top audit firms, namely Ferguson & Co., Price Water House, S. R. Batliboi etc. They are the top audit firms. The Institute of Chartered Accountants wrote to the Reserve Bank. The Reserve Bank gave them a technical reply that they have not blacklisted them but they have not reappointed them because they were the auditors connected with the securities scam transactions. So, for one year the Reserve Bank is waiting to see what the JPC says, what the Janakiraman Committee says and then they will make up their mind. And now the Minister says in his reply, "Reserve Bank of India have reported that they have not blacklisted any audit firm. (b) Does not arise (c) No, Sir. (d) Does not arise."

Sir, this is a very serious matter. We as Members of Parliament are responsible people. I have asked a question in all seriousness. They could have said that these 17 firms have been kept under caution list or they could have used any other technical jargon they wanted, but they cannot give